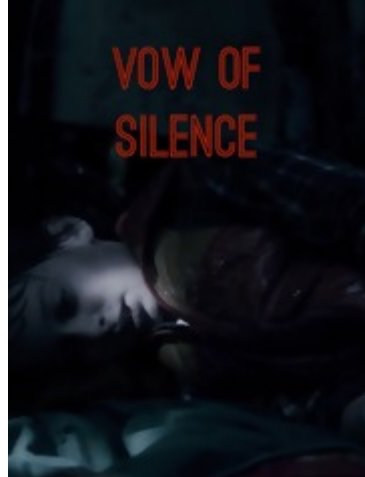


VOW OF SILENCE



Vow of Silence by Momolovesanime

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Summary: This is the story of 012. Ripped from her mother at an incredibly young age and brutally experimented on, 012 finally escapes Hawkins Lab with the help of another experiment, 011. However, after falling down in the woods and losing track of 011, 012 finds herself in a dark world fraught with horrifying monsters and a mysterious boy. Things only get stranger after that.

1. Chapter 1

A baby's fervent cries rang through all the ears in the operating room. The mother exhaled in sweet relief. The pain was over for now; her baby had been born. The doctors finished tending to the mother as the nurses took the baby to clean it off.

"Where... Where is she?" the mother asked deliriously. "I want to see her..."

"Here you go, ma'am," one of the nurses replied, handing the child to the mother.

Swaddled in a soft bunny blanket, the child continued to cry and cry as she was placed into her mother's arms. The nurse offered to take a Polaroid for the mother, but she declined.

"Charlotte..." the mother cooed. "Shh, shh... Mommy's here. Mommy's got you."

By then, the baby girl had stopped crying and looked into the mother's eyes. A strange feeling entered the mother's heart. She felt almost afraid, and a tiny bit sad. She couldn't figure out why. It wasn't her emotion, but somehow she still felt it.

The nurses had to take back the baby in order to finish their jobs. The mother was wheeled back to her room where her small family and close friends waited. There were pink balloons floating everywhere and stuffed animals lining all the flat surfaces.

"When can we see her?" the mother's brother asked.

"I don't know..." replied the mother, still a bit groggy from the medicine.

A low murmur filled the room as the visitors began congratulating the mother quietly. Almost a minute later, a doctor came sprinting in the doorway.

"If you're not family, please leave," he said rather curtly, looking nervous and slightly upset.

After a few blinks of stunned silence, a couple of the visitors began shuffling out as they breathed rude whispers about being kicked out.

"Is everything alright?" asked the father of the mother.

The mother's heart rate began beeping quicker on the monitor.

"We were doing the routine hearing screenings," the doctor began. The mother looked to her father as her mother put a hand on her shoulder. "And she wasn't responding well as most infants normally do..."

"What does that mean?" the grandmother asked.

"She has significant hearing loss from the point where we brought her in, almost to the point of total deafness," he explained.

Everyone in the room gasped.

"My baby... My baby is deaf?" the mother asked, almost on the verge of tears. The hand on her shoulder tightened its grip.

"What... What are our options?" asked the mother's father. "Hearing aids-"

"Hearing aids might work to an extent, but each case is different. I can't give you a guaranteed option," he replied. "I'll have a nurse give you some business cards for specialists." He stood up and said, "I'm very sorry, but congratulations, ma'am." He walked out.

No one in the room knew what to say.

"No one in our family is deaf..." the mother said, holding back tears. "How did this even happen? I mean... What am I going to do?"

"We'll figure it out," her mother comforted. "We can handle this. God will provide us an answer."

"I'll go get the number of those specialists..." her father said, walking out of the room.

As mother began silently crying, her brother took her hand and tried

to reassure her.

The mother's mind was racing with so many questions and emotions, it was almost impossible to sleep. But as visiting hours quickly ended, she wallowed in silence alone and full of doubt.

From the first day this child was born, she had gone from a hearing child to a hard of hearing child to totally deaf within the span of the first hour of her life. The specialists recommended by the doctors couldn't do anything to help and the hearing aids didn't work.

But even with this news, the little girl was the most beautiful gift the mother could have ever asked for. Her large and darling green eyes felt mysterious and ethereal, and her platinum blonde hair shone vibrantly. Despite knowing challenges we're sure to rear their heads in the future, the mother was completely happy and content with her child, even her little ears. Her deafness didn't have to be a disability.

But her ethereal cuteness wasn't the main intrigue of the child. The mother knew from the first instance of holding her new daughter that she was special. She could feel strange emotions occasionally in the pit of her stomach. The mother thought it was just her hormones at first, but in time, she knew it was her baby causing it. The little one had a gift, a special power. She shared her feelings with those around her without having to say anything. If the little one felt scared or angry, sometimes the mother could feel those things as well. When family came to visit, they always picked up that something was a little peculiar about this baby, but what, they couldn't figure it out.

Many harmless incidents happened within the first months, but the when the child was a couple months old, something strange began to happen. The mother had set her in the high chair and began cutting up some bananas into thin slices when a feeling of anger boiled into her stomach. The child began crying.

"What's wrong?" asked the mother.

Suddenly, the mother stopped cutting the banana and dropped the knife onto the counter. Her face turned almost white as a sheet as she turned around and walked robotically back to the refrigerator. As she opened the door, she pulled out a small tub of puréed carrots.

To an outsider, this seemed like a completely normal thing to do, but inside the mother wasn't in control of any of her actions during this small incident.

When the child had forfeited influence over her mother, the mother screamed and dropped the carrots on the floor, spilling them. All she could do was stare at her child in awe and fear. A small drop of blood was pooling out of the child's left nostril.

Her gift was growing in strength. It started with sharing her emotions and now she could influence other minds to do things.

Despite the unsettling incident, the mother ran to her child and hugged her, trying to calm her down more for the child's sake than her own. She took a dry washcloth from the sink and dabbed the blood from her baby's nose.

She stared at her child for a while, wondering what to do about her possibly dangerous gift.

About a month later, when the little one was about 10 months old, tragedy struck her tiny life.

In the dead of the night, the mother was fast asleep. A small, muffled cry came over the baby monitor, but it didn't wake the mother up. Another cry, this time a little louder. Something was wrong. The mother's eyes slowly opened, hearing the second cry. She yawned, waking up hearing more muffled cries from her daughter. Suddenly, the cries turned angry and desperate. The mother sat up, becoming a little concerned. She must have really needed her diaper changed, the mother thought. An uneasy wave of deep anxiety came over the mother.

Over the desperate screams and cries of the baby, another muffled voice rang through the speaker of the baby monitor.

The mother stopped in her tracks, freezing in panic. Someone was in her house. With a furiously beating heart, she took a hesitant step towards her door. More cries echoed through the baby monitor. She finally worked up the courage to go outside of her room. She scampered out into the hall and hesitated once more before deciding

to confront the presence in the child's room.

She didn't get half way down the hall before seeing three men dressed in all black carrying her child out of the room. Her child was screaming and crying angrily, not liking this unexpected capture at such a late hour. The mother stopped dead in her tracks. The three men noticed her frozen down the hall and began scurrying out of the house with her baby in hand.

"Stop!" the mother shrieked desperately. She ran for the kidnappers wildly, flailing her arms in fear and fury. "Don't take her! Don't take my baby!"

Two of the men stayed back as the one carrying the child hurried out of the house. The two men held the crazed mother back so as to let their comrade escape with the stolen child. One of them whipped out a small syringe and jammed it into her neck as the mother shrieked, screamed, and cried, "Don't take my baby! Don't take my baby!" over and over again.

The mother slowly started to lose consciousness and sank to the floor. "You can't... take her..." she slurred. "She's... d..." But she couldn't finish her last word: *deaf*.

The mother woke up the next day with a cold shiver and sweat-soaked clothes. She sat up at once, eyes opened wide and terror-filled. She noticed she was back in her bed. Running to the nursery immediately after, she gasped and fell to her knees in complete and utter despair at the sight of the empty crib. The mother wept uncontrollably. Unbeknownst to her, it was the last time she would ever see her daughter again.

The first thought in her mind was that of the declined Polaroid offered by that nurse. Ludicrous, it seemed to deny such a special memory. It would continue to weigh on her mind until the day she died.

The cross shaped building in the unassuming town of Hawkins, Indiana seemed to mock the trinity with the immoral and unholy evils lurking within. The seemingly innocuous van drove up to the

guard shack as they passed the aloof fence that warned all who thought of entering. After being allowed to enter, the cold building loomed ahead as the van drove under the grayish sky. From the distance, it looked like a prison, but on the inside it was worse.

The child was carried into the laboratory very much against her will, which she so plainly shared with the guards through sharing her emotions and wildly angry cries. Passing the child over to the doctors, the soldiers felt relief now that their job was over. The doctors took the child to a small examination room to do a simple check up to make sure the child was healthy and had gifts.

Dr. Brenner watched outside from the window and gazed with a slight smile across his face as the doctors conducted their tests.

It took a while before the child became calm enough to examine. One of the nurses had to rock the child in her arms for about ten minutes.

While examining, one of the doctors noticed something a little off with the baby. When she moved on to the hearing portion of the exam and snapped in the baby's left ear, the baby just stared at her, not reacting at all to the noise. Thinking this odd, the doctor clapped loudly, hoping to draw the attention of the child with the sound.

"What's wrong?" asked the other doctor.

"Bring me its previous charts..." the first asked.

A nurse handed the doctor the files on the child. She began shuffling through them, searching for something.

"What?" asked the other doctor again.

"Ah," she said. "That explains it." She plopped the files on the table next to the child and pointed at a particular line.

Dr. Brenner outside noticed both of the scientists gazing at the files. He pressed a button on the wall and said, "What's the matter? What are you looking at?"

"Um, sir," the second doctor said, "the child is deaf."

Dr. Brenner didn't respond immediately. "Well, continue with the preliminary examination."

"But, sir, what are we going to do?" asked the first doctor.

"That doesn't matter right now," he brushed off. "Continue."

The two doctors exchanged nervous glances at each other before returning to their work. They concluded that the child was perfectly healthy other than her ears and reported such to Dr. Brenner.

"Excellent," he said, forming a fresh smile. "Move onto the next phase."

"Of course, sir," said the doctors.

The medical doctors and staff moved out of the way while the PhDs entered the room for the next phase. Despite their high ranking doctorates, this examination was far less formal and truly scientific than the medical doctors' exams. Mostly, they just poked and prodded the child in hopes of inciting whatever gifts the child possessed. As the poking became annoying to the little one, she began to shift angrily and more than willingly let all in the room feel it. One of the scientists began recording the behavior of the child and the sensations felt. Eventually, the little one was so upset that she tried to make everyone walk out of the room, but couldn't actually control so many people at once. Little drops of blood began pooling at the end of her nose. A nurse noticed and quickly wiped it away.

The scribe in the room smiled gleefully after the experience and wrote down *mental manipulation* under her special skills.

"Dr. Brenner!" he said. "I think this one will be good."

"Fantastic," Brenner replied. "What can it do?"

"Influence emotions and even manipulation of other persons, sir," he answered. "With time, I hypothesize its powers will only grow."

Brenner smiled once again. "Alright, we'll put it into the program. What experiment are we on by now?"

"Twelve, sir," one of the PHDs replied.

"Great," he said. "Alright, then. Experiment 012. Let's put it in the rainbow room, as well. It does have a mental ability as well as the other two."

"Sir, if I may," the first doctor asked. "What are we going to do about her deafness?"

"Just teach it to read and write like the others," he said. "We don't need to go through the trouble of teaching it speech."

"Yes, sir," the doctor replied.

The next couple of hours sealed the child's fate there in the prison, wherein she should have remained until the day of her death.

A nurse carried the child of the room, holding it loosely to her breast, trying not to get attached to it. That's what happened to the last nurse; she was quickly fired.

That was the goal of the whole child-monitoring staff. The repeating mantra in everyone's head: *Don't get attached*. These children they held weren't actually children, they were seen as rats or gerbils or monkeys only for the scientific purpose of experimenting. None of the experiments were granted gender-specific pronouns for fear of humanizing a child.

Don't get attached.

So the nurse carried her off to a room down the hall where the mark was to be made on her left arm. The nurse cleaned off the spot on her arm with cold alcohol to sterilize the area. She routinely cleaned the needle off of the tattoo apparatus. She nearly hesitated as she held the inking machine over the child's arm. As she turned on the device and held the arm steady, she drew a small 012 on her forearm. The child began wailing and shrieking, even sharing her emotions with the nurse in protest. The inking was soon finished; it wasn't a very big mark. But, the child continued to cry. With the horrible sadness and pain the nurse felt in her gut, her eyes began welling up in sympathy for the poor thing. She tried to mask it and wished it to be

over quickly, but the child held on. Eventually, a single tear fell from her eyes. She had to walk out of the room to regain a stoic air again.

This child was going to be hard not to get attached to, especially with her tele-empathetic prowess. To feel her emotions leads to sympathy and sympathy leads to bonding which is absolutely out of the question.

The nurse covered her new mark with a bandage so that it would heal properly and so that the child couldn't scratch or itch at it. She carried the little one to another nurse that placed her inside her new cell.

About 8 feet by 8 feet, the square room became her new home. Furnished with a crib, later replaced with a small bed, a desk, and a small chest of drawers, this square was one of the only things the child would remember about her time in Hawkins Lab.

Dr. Brenner sat down at the head of a table filled with the scientists and doctors who examined the child.

"Give me the full story," he said.

The doctors jumped at the opportunity first.

"012 is deaf, but other than that, she's perfectly healthy. So far the only side-effect of her powers is a nosebleed," said the second doctor.

"Yes, and, sir, you have instructed us to only teach her how to read and write," inserted the first doctor. Brenner nodded. "Alright." The doctor wrote something down on a piece of paper.

"So, what 012 do?" asked Brenner. "Someone said influence emotions, I believe... Please, do explain."

The people in the room began glancing at each other as if to say they all shared a similar experience.

"We believe it's some sort of empathic ability, but as far as we know, it's only one way- a sort of... cross between telepathic and empathic ability," one scientist explained. "012 shares its emotions with other

people, but we did encounter another ability as well, and I think you'll find this one more compelling."

"Mind control!" another shouted out excitedly.

"We prefer to call it manipulative hypnosis or mental manipulation," the scribe interrupted haughtily.

Dr. Brenner held back a smile. "So, where do we think these abilities will go in the future? What are we looking at?"

"If 012 only has these abilities and they grow with age and practice, we believe a total mental manipulation is possible, meaning that 012 could completely control another human," the first scientist described eruditely. "Also, with the tele-empathetic abilities, 012 might eventually be able to influence and change the emotions of others instead of just broadcasting its emotions."

"This is all speculation, I would like to clarify that, Dr. Brenner," the scribe added quickly.

"Speculation is good," he said. "Speculation creates an end goal. Well, good work everyone, and keep me updated on the case."

"Yes, sir," the room responded.

Dr. Brenner was especially interested in the potential applications of 012's so-called manipulative hypnotic abilities.

Yes, he thought. *This one will certainly be of use to me.*

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2. Chapter 2

Dr. Brenner crept close to 012 with a small chalkboard. He gently placed it in front of 012's eyes, allowing her to read the message.

I want you to take control of this. Can you do that for me?

Her once-glittering eyes gazed over the board and then to the animal set before her. It was an adult calico cat, but she didn't know that. The terrified yellow slitted-eyes hissed warily at her as it backing into a corner of the cage. 012's eyes flitted back to her Papa. He moved the board closer once more, wanting an answer from his experiment. She looked back at the chalkboard and then to Papa, nodding hesitantly.

He smiled and said, "Good."

The young girl, now about eight years of age, glared at the cat with a determined stare. She gently rested her hands one by one on the table palms-down and continued her concentration. The cat was now growling and hissing at the girl. The hackles on it stood up as far as they could reach and the tail puffed out to about eight times its usual size. The cat knew this girl was dangerous, but despite its threats, the girl continued her concentration. Low grunts and sounds began escaping from her mouth. Blood started dripping from her nose as she clenched her fists, trying to garner all the strength in her system.

Finally, the girl collapsed in her seat. Simultaneously, the cat relaxed and Dr. Brenner smiled once more. The cat turned its head to look at Brenner and walked closer to him. Within seconds the girl regained her consciousness back and the cat retreated to the corner again. The blood was spilling out of her nose at this point.

Dr. Brenner looked upon his experiment with pride as he walked over to her. Putting a hand on her shoulder, he smiled at her. A form of a smile curved its way across 012's mouth as her feelings of happiness flooded into Dr. Brenner. He took up the chalkboard and erased the previous message.

Well done, he wrote.

Dr. Brenner looked out the window to the people observing and said, "See, this is what progress looks like."

Another scientist came up to 012, touching her shoulder to alert her of his presence and began carefully removing the electrode hat from her head. Her eyes flitted around the room, sensing movement from somewhere. Through the window, she saw another experiment being dragged down the hall by two guards. The two locked eyes for a split second as 012 wiped away the blood from her nose and chin before Dr. Brenner stood in front of 012's gaze, shielding her from the sight.

He patted her on the back and ushered her to walk towards the door. As she approached the threshold, she looked to the left to watch the experiment being taken away. The two guards were holding her by the arms. One of them stopped to open the door closest to them. Once the door was open, the experiment was thrown into the door as it shut immediately. 012 scrunched her eyebrows in confusion. She looked to her Papa and shared this confusion with him. As she pointed at the guards, Brenner twisted her shoulders the opposite direction and lead her down the opposite side of the hall. Noises of confusion and frustration began leaking through her mouth as she tried to turn around, but Brenner just twisted her shoulders once more and lead her down the hallway. 012 learned better than to fight one more time and continued walking without contention. Her green eyes shifted to the floor as they walked on. Brenner smirked as he realized that 012 wasn't going to fight him anymore as he led her back to her room. He liked when his experiments cooperated with him, and 012 was having a great day with obedience.

Once the two had reached her room, he patted her head twice. That was his way of saying goodbye to his deaf experiment. She, in return, took his hand and patted it twice, to say goodbye as well. He shut the door to her room and locked it.

This routine was most of 012's life in Hawkins Lab. In the intervals between experiments, she was taught reading and writing from various nurses. They even taught her a couple of unofficial hand signs for things like goodbye and Papa so that she would have to spell out everything on a chalkboard or paper while trying to communicate. And almost once a week, Papa would come in and take her to another room to perform an experiment in front of a glass window

with maybe three or four onlookers and several scientists in the room. After it was finished, he would escort her back to her room and lock the door.

The various experiments were hardly different from each other. It started off small, just to find a base line for 012's abilities. First, they decided to explore her tele-empathetic abilities. It was difficult at first trying to communicate what exactly the scientists wanted her to do since she was young and couldn't read or comprehend much at first, but with more intensive teaching, she was able to understand. With these experiments, the scientists discovered that she couldn't manipulate others emotions just yet, but she could broadcast them to just about everyone in a room. It started with a faint feeling in the pit of the stomach of the affected, but with time as 012 grew stronger, she could broadcast her emotions stronger and clearer. Next came the manipulative hypnosis part of her abilities. 012 started out only being able to influence people to do small tasks, something someone could easily overcome with a bit of sheer will power. With time, she learned how to order people to do tasks, something they could just barely overcome, if even at all.

But Brenner wanted more.

He wanted 012 to be able to do more with this mental manipulation. He wanted a full-on mental takeover from the girl. He started her off with small animals- rats, mice, small birds and the like. As 012 began to fulfill Brenner's wildest dreams of total takeover, a glaring flaw in her abilities became apparent. In exchange for fully taking over someone else's mind, her consciousness seemed to leave her body and she goes limp, completely vulnerable and numb to her body's senses.

Despite this, Brenner insisted on furthering her progress. The last experiment, the cat, was the largest animal she was able to control so far at about the age of eight. And for the next experiment, he wanted to jump ahead in the food chain. Without heading the warnings of the scientists, he wanted 012 to take control of a human being. He thought she was ready. The cat seemed so easy.

"These numbers are the best we've gotten so far in 012's history," one of the scientists said.

"Fantastic," Brenner said. "Can we move the schedule up, then?"

"How far...?" he asked. "A couple of weeks or-"

"To human testing," Brenner interrupted. "I believe 012 is more than capable."

The room fell silent.

"Sir, controlling an actual human is a large cry from controlling a simple feline. I mean, the cerebral capacities alone are vastly different- not to mention the size!" one of the scientists tried to reason. He took a breath. "Dr. Brenner, in my opinion, I don't believe what you're asking of 012 is possible at this time, let alone a good idea. Why deviate from the proposed schedule now? Human testing isn't for another year. If something were to happen to-"

"To whom? 012? The test subject?" he asked, raising an eyebrow condescendingly. "012 won't be an issue, and if it happens to hurt the test subject, then so what? What can one man do, sue us?" He choked out a laugh. "We can deal with an angry man and his lawyer."

"But, sir-" another tried to say.

"Push it up," he ordered. "I want this ready by next week."

There was a moment of silence before the handful of scientist began shuffling around papers and began leaving the room whilst mumbling stressfully.

As the scientist began preparing for the next big experiment, what they didn't and probably never realized was that 012's abilities began growing that very day right under their noses.

In 012's room, she sat on her bed clutching her knees while watching the walls. Something strange appeared in the pit of her stomach. A slight sensation of terror and sadness manifested in 012's belly from someone else. Now usually, she could do this to other people, but now she was starting to pick up on strong emotions of other people. As she explored this new and strange feeling in her stomach, she felt cold and dark. Wherever this other person was, 012 didn't like this place, this room was small. She wanted to get out, and get out now.

But she couldn't, she was trapped, and it was helpless. She became so absorbed with these alien emotions, she felt like she could almost see what was happening inside the room.

012 closed her eyes and fed into this new sensation.

When she opened them, she was standing alone in an expansive black room. Turning her head to the right side in confusion, she saw the same experiment from earlier that day writhing on the floor. She was banging against invisible walls and sobbing. 012 began walking towards the experiment with caution. It seemed like she was walking over water. As she approached the wailing experiment, it softened its cries as it felt her presence come near.

The experiment looked around, alone in the dark room in her reality, but she could sense something come closer to her. She looked around once more and wiped a tear from her eye.

"Hello...?" she choked out.

012 watched as the experiment mouthed words and gazed confusedly at her. The emotions in the pit of her stomach changed from terror to a cautious feeling. In response to this, 012 shared an emotion of peace to counter the negative feelings.

In reality, as the positive emotions hit her, the experiment felt a bit relieved. At least whatever was there wasn't going to hurt her. In the midst of the dark room, she silenced her sobs and bangs on the wall and began to feel more at ease.

012 watched the experiment's face relax as someone jerked her back into reality. A sudden startled cry erupted from 012's mouth as she looked up to see a nurse hovering over her with a concerned look on her face. A drip of something warm and sticky seeped into her mouth when she made a noise. It tasted sort of metallic. She touched her upper lip and brought it to her eyes; blood was spilling from her nose. But the nurse was quick to wipe it away with a washcloth from the sink. The nurse asked under her breath what on earth 012 was doing, but it rang- quite literally- on deaf ears. But it didn't matter. 012's lessons were starting soon.

As 012 was ushered to her desk, she scribbled down on a chalkboard in messy handwriting, *There are more like 12 here?* She tapped on the board to get the nurse's attention.

The nurse was slightly caught off guard at the question, but in a second, she erased the question from the board and tried to ignore it. She looked back at the frustrated girl and saw that her hair had become frayed and loose from the braids they kept it in.

012 was allowed hair solely because when they tried to shave it, she got so scared that she forced them to leave with her abilities and shared the greatest sense of fear with everyone in the room that no one could even move. And the braids complimented electrodes placed on her head during the experiments in that her hair lay close to her scalp without obstructing the sensors, so they let her keep her hair instead of shaving it like the rest of the experiments.

So, seeing 012's hair was becoming a mess, the nurse walked back towards her and touched her shoulder. 012's head jerked up at the touch. The nurse touched her own hair and subsequently touched 012's. 012 nodded, understanding what was happening. The nurse began undoing the experiment's frizzy blonde braids so she could gently and neatly redo them.

This was the same nurse that watched over 012 on the first day in Hawkins Lab. Because of her familiarity with the girl, this nurse worked almost exclusively with 012. She vowed she wouldn't get attached that day, but with spending so much time with the girl and practically teaching and raising her, it was hard not to. Still, there was a bond there, mutual trust, in fact. She hid her feelings from her bosses all too easily. Feigning indifference wasn't all that hard apparently.

As she looked into the dazzling and innocent green eyes of the experiment, she couldn't help but to feel a little bit of pity for the child. She quickly looked away and continued braiding.

Don't get attached... she lied to herself.

The next week, the scientists had all prepared for the next

experiment. Dr. Brenner escorted 012 to a room with a man sitting at a table; various scientist were scattered around the room attending to certain things. She stared at the man while entering the threshold of the room. She sat down across from the man while Dr. Brenner slid a chalkboard to her.

I want you to take control of this man. Can you do that for me?

A slight cry of surprise escaped from her mouth as she read the board. She looked at the man, noticeably upset. Brenner put a hand on her shoulder and looked at his experiment with warm eyes of encouragement. He nodded at her. 012 looked up at her Papa with wide eyes as Brenner's smile remained constant. He nodded at 012 once more. Her gaze turned to the man sitting across from her.

One of the scientists in the room went to put the electrode helmet around her skull. As the others started up the EEG machine, the needles began recording the readings on long strips of paper.

012 began by putting both of her hands on the table one-by-one, palms down. As she tried to take control over the man in front of her, her face began twitching in concentration. The man gulped as he looked at the child before him. He began to feel a slight tingling sensation in his throat, making him cough a little. The sensation began spreading throughout his whole body like a sedative through his veins. He shifted slightly in his chair and looked around anxiously, trying not to make any more eye contact with the girl. 012's nose began oozing blood as she tried to take over the man before her. The man's face began twitching in synchronization with 012's a couple seconds later. Dr. Brenner smiled, watching his experiment accomplish new abilities.

But something strange happened before 012 could succeed in her mission. She had almost taken control, blood pouring from her nose at this point, and was feeling her consciousness leak from her body and pour itself into the man when she got stuck- stuck in between the two bodies. Her body had fallen limp behind her and she was staring at the man in front of her in panic, unable to get into his mind.

While 012 was stuck, the scientists had seen her body fall limp as the EEG scans began to go flat. One of them nodded at Dr. Brenner. All

eyes were fixed on the man who felt completely fine now. No tingling, no anything. Just normal.

"I don't feel any different..." he admitted, looking at his hands.

Everyone was silent for a couple of seconds.

"What's wrong?" Dr. Brenner asked, beginning to feel a bit anxious.

"What's happening? Someone, tell me what's happening!"

The scientists began shuffling through the rolls of paper with the readings on it, scanning and studying them.

"Um, sir, everyone looks normal," one said. "The scans show the consciousness leaving. 012 should have made contact by now."

The scientists just stared at each other and then at the man.

"Well, obviously 012 hasn't!" he yelled.

Over the confused murmurs stumbling through the air, one of the scientists in the room began feeling a bit light headed and short of breath. He started coughing small at first, but within seconds, it was more violent hacking than actual coughing. He was choking. Grasped his blue throat with one hand, he reached out in a panic to someone else for a crutch.

"Hey, are you alright...?" asked the scientist whom the other had grabbed.

To both of the scientist's horror, the afflicted one's eyes began rolling back in his head as his feet collapsed from under him.

"What's going on?!" Dr. Brenner yelled.

The scientist that first noticed his friend collapsing bent over to check his pulse immediately.

With a sudden gasp for air, 012's body lit back up with life as she fell from her chair and onto the cold tiled floor. All of the blood had drained from her head and was pouring from her nose and ears. Her sunken eyes had turned yellow and bloodshot. Her ghostly pale face

looked up at her Papa with a pathetic and tired look.

"He's dead..." the scientist said, bending over the body of his friend.

The whole room went completely silent.

012 was too weak to get up from the floor, so she just stayed there as everyone in the room stared at her with cold, accusing eyes. She didn't know what went wrong or how it all happened, but she could feel the emotions of everyone in the room stabbing into her stomach.

Hatred. Sadness. Fear. Disgust.

All Dr. Brenner could say was, "What have you done...?"

Though she couldn't hear him, his disappointment was glaring into her soul. He turned away from her and rubbed his temples.

"Take her away."

The same two guards who had carried away the other experiment last week came inside and grabbed 012 by the arms. They began dragging her out of the room and down the hall. Sobs and groans of protest emerged from her mouth, but that was all she could do to fight it. She watched as her Papa looked away from her, not caring about her, casting her aside, ignoring her pleas for help. And it broke her fragile heart. The guards threw her into the dark room through the cries and grunts of anguish and sadness coming from her mouth.

The room was all too familiar to 012. This was the same room that the other experiment was thrown in. This was the room where Papa's failures went.

It was dark, cold, and small. The walls seemed to close in on 012 as she backed into the corner, sobbing violently. She was too fatigued to try and bang on the walls as the other had tried, but it would be useless anyway. 012's yellowy-red eyes puffed out and even more irritated as abundant tears flooded her once-dazzling green eyes.

All faith and hope in her Papa had been shattered as she lied in that cold, dark room as she wallowed alone in her absolute silence.

Hours had passed since 012's imprisonment began. No tears streamed down her face now. She could only feel numbness and sadness. The tears had stained her cheeks pink and shiny, and left her extinguished eyes glassy and lifeless.

She was sitting in the back left corner of the room, clutching her knees with her fingernails. She was probably bleeding, but she couldn't feel it anymore.

She thought of the other experiment who had been in here the week before. 012 had comforted her in her time of great woe, so she thought that maybe now the reverse would be true. She thought long and hard about the face of the girl and tried to reach out to her by sending her emotions to the girl. 012 closed her eyes and tried to go back to her mind void.

When she awoke in her black abyss, she waited silently. She stared out into the blackness, hoping for a sign from the girl.

012 was startled quite thoroughly when she felt a touch on her shoulder. She twirled around and saw the girl from before. She didn't have hardly any hair left, but what was left was dark brunette. Her eyes were round, doe-like, and coffee-colored.

The girl mouthed something, but 012 couldn't understand and stared blankly at the girl. The girl held out her hand for 012 and helped her off of the ground. But when 012 tried to let go, the girl still held her arm, staring at something. 012 looked down and saw the tattoo on her left arm. That was her name, 012. The girl smiled and showed her arm in return.

"011," the girl said. She pointed herself.

012 pointed to her own tattoo and then to herself as well. A flicker of happiness ignited within 012's stomach from the girl. She could feel a smile begin to curve around her mouth as 011 disappeared into the blackness as a foggy haze.

012 emerged from her mind void with a smile and a bloody nose again.

Despite their very short and seemingly fruitless interaction, both of them felt connected to the other. A wonderful bond had been created despite the infernal circumstances surrounding the two, a bond that could truly span dimensions.

012 fell in disfavor with Dr. Brenner after the failed experiment. She had humiliated him and- even worse- killed someone in the process. Brenner blacklisted 012 and rarely went to see her after that. She was secluded in her room and the only face she ever saw was her nurse and sometimes 011 in her mind void. She was barely ever brought outside to do experiments anymore.

Three years had passed like this and 012 was about eleven years old when disaster struck Hawkins Lab.

It was a seemingly normal day during the late afternoon at Hawkins Lab. Experiment 011 was going to make history, or so they said.

The day was November 6th, 1983 when the gate opened.

012 was sitting in her desk as the nurse taught. The lights began flickering sporadically, which didn't really alarm either of them then. That is, until all the lights flickered off and the whole lab went completely dark for a couple of seconds. 012 shifted in her chair nervously. The nurse held up her index finger, and hurried out the room with a confused look on her face. The fluorescents began fading in and out repeatedly. 012 looked up and wondered what was going on.

As the nurse walked outside, the alarms began blaring as the lights faded in and out regularly. A cold shiver raced down her spine.

"Emergency..." the loudspeaker blared. It was a calm, robotic female voice. "*All personnel evacuate immediately.*"

She stood there in her blue scrubs, frozen at the gravity and reality of the alarm. All of a sudden, people burst out of the rooms next to her and began running down the halls in a panic. She slowly turned towards 012's door and finally found the courage to sprint in.

"Emergency..." the loudspeaker repeated. *"All personnel evacuate immediately."*

She didn't have time to explain to the child, and she didn't have time to think. The nurse just grabbed 012's hand and began running.

Grunts and noises of confusion escaped 012's mouth as she was jerked from her desk ever so violently by her nurse. They sprinted to the elevator, but it was in use. The nurse ran over to the stairs and smashed open the door, dragging 012 alongside her. The two began descending the flights quickly. They were joined by more people on the way down escaping in a frenzy. The nurse did her best to protect the girl from hurried employees not caring if they trampled whomever was in front of them. In time, they had both made it to the lobby mostly unscathed.

The lobby was jam-packed with terrified workers all trying to evacuate immediately. No one really knew what was happening in the lab to cause a full-on evacuation, but everyone knew it couldn't be good. When the two had finally made their way out of the lobby and outside, the mass exodus of people was a crowd easily followed.

012 looked around in terror at all of the people hurrying to leave the lab. The nurse had grasp of her wrist, but she was being shoved and pushed from every direction. Feeling too overwhelmed, she tried to scurry her way out of the mob, but in doing so, she somehow separated from the nurse's grip. She was violently thrown out of the frantic mob and onto the pavement of the lab. When 012 looked back at the lab, she saw the lights flashing from inside. People were still shuffling out of the lab and nobody had noticed her absence yet.

012's heart raced in her chest as she looked at the crowd of people exiting. This was her chance to escape her prison. Her eyes flitted around, trying to find a way out of the lab without following the horde.

With a sudden grunt of surprise, 012 was knocked over. When she had realized what happened, a hand was pulling her back up. Face to face for the first time, 011 and 012 stared at each other. 011 blinked quickly, grabbed 012's hand, and began sprinting in the opposite direction of the crowd.

While running, they stumbled upon a small drain pipe just big enough for each of them to crawl through. Both of the girls looked at each other for a split second. 011 threw herself to the ground and started crawling, but 012 need a split second to figure out what was happening. Within a second, she was down on all fours crawling through the hole after 011.

Scrambling, panting, and heaving their way through the damp and clammy pipe, the two girls army-crawled their way to freedom. 011 tripped and got caught on a twig as she stumbled out of the pipe, tearing a small hole on the edge of her gown. She waited frantically for 012 to exit as well. As 012 began exiting the drain, she, too, tripped and fell out of the pipe. But, in doing so, she scraped her knee on a nearby rock.

"Arghh!" she yelled in pain.

011 helped her up quickly and the two tried to run off into the night. But as 012 stood up, her scraped knee gave out and she fell back to the ground. 011 didn't notice her fall and continued running away from the lab. 012 tried to make a noise or something to ask her to wait, but she couldn't make her voice work.

012 almost began crying as she looked down and saw blood dripping down her leg. She scooted over to the closest tree and helped herself up. It was quite painful to walk on, but she could stagger through it. Tiny yelps and noises of pain eked out of her mouth when she took steps on her throbbing and bruised knee, but that was to be expected.

However, what wasn't expected was a sudden rush of cold air behind 012.

With a small gasp, 012 twirled around slowly, trying to ease off of her hurt leg as much as possible. She didn't see anything behind her, but she certainly felt something strange pass behind her.

Lurking in the shadows away from sight stalked a grotesque monster with no face. It had smelled the blood from 012's recent knee scrape and come to investigate. With no way of hearing the terrifying creature, 012 was surely at a grave disadvantage.

Within seconds, the girl was pulled from reality into an alternate shadow dimension by the monster hunting her. 012 was unaware of her change in location at first, but as she took a closer look at her surroundings, something seemed a little strange. There were outlandish particles floating in the air around her, and even though the sun was almost set, the forest looked darker, almost devoid of color. Even weirder, fiendish looking roots and branches twisted and weaved themselves all over the earth under her bare feet.

Without her knowledge, the monster began drawing closer to her, creeping step by step behind her as she looked around in awe and confusion. Its faceless head had begun to open into a mouth with rows of glistening teeth when just out the forest, the monster sensed something else and took off into the distance.

012 spun around less slowly this time, feeling the second rush of cold air that night and saw the monster running away. She froze in horror and stumbled backwards, gasping with wide eyes.

When she had found the courage to continue walking, 012 began wandering through the alternate forest with apprehensive steps and flitting eyes. Not knowing when or where the monster would return, she could only watch and wait as she hiked through the forest.

012 didn't know how many minutes had passed while she walked when her keen eyes caught the shape of something moving in the distance. Immediately she sucked in the toxic air in fright, and stumbled behind a tree. Her heart raced and she stopped breathing for a moment. 012 grasped the tree firmly as she slowly peaked her head out slightly from behind the tree to see where the thing was moving.

The thing had come closer to her in the moments of her hiding, but it didn't look like the monster. In fact, it looked like a human- a boy. He was running through the woods in a panic.

012 staggered out from behind the tree, seeing he wasn't an enemy. It seemed the boy and the girl locked eyes for a split second. She could feel his fear stabbing itself into her stomach. He looked at her for that brief moment and took off running in the opposite direction.

Well, he looked at an injured girl with a hospital gown on and frizzy hair. Not exactly the most welcoming and soothing vision to see in a dark forest after being chased by a monster.

012 made a noise of disappointment as she saw him sprint away from her. She held out her hand in a way of symbolic speech as if to say, "No, don't go." But he just kept running. Her last resort to try and win over the boy was to send him her emotions.

A calm and warm feeling began spreading through the system of the boy, and he stopped in his tracks. He slowly turned his head backwards in a cold sweat and locked eyes with the mysterious girl once more. His heart was pounding furiously and he was breathing heavily after all that running. Despite every possible instinct he had and knowledge of how this usually happened in horror movies, he took a step towards the girl and began walking towards her cautiously.

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3. Chapter 3

The boy was a couple yards away from the mysterious girl. She was just standing there, staring at him with a sort of smile curved across her mouth. He noticed that her knee was scraped and her gown looked filthy. Where the heck had this girl come from?

He took his final step near her, still a good distance away in case she was dangerous.

"Who are you?" he asked, coughing a little. "And..." He looked away nervously. "Did you do that...?" His voice trailed off as he shook his head, dismissing the subject.

His lip quivered in anxiety as he watched her, eyes wide and alert. She just stared at him. She took a hobbled step forward, but he took a step back, cautious of her approach.

"Don't come any closer!" he warned quickly, flashing his hands out.

Their eyes barely ever looked away from each other. Both were studying the other intently.

"I... I said, who are you?" he asked again.

The girl tilted her head down, but kept eye contact with him for as long as she could before she looked down to continue walking towards him. He tried to take another step back, but a similar sensation like the one before washed over him. He felt almost calm, but it wasn't him feeling calm. It was like someone was feeling it for him.

"You... Are you doing that?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

She was stepping slowly and stumbled a bit as she walked nearer to him. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up as he looked at her. His insides were screaming at him to run and hide, but something about her made him stay.

Finally, she was face to face with him. Green eyes staring into green eyes. The boy's heart was racing as he watched and waited for her to

do something, anything.

In 012's mind, she was wondering how on earth she was going to write something to the boy so that they could communicate. She didn't have her chalk board here, so she struggled to find an effective way to communicate with him.

Suddenly, she figured it out. She started to reach for the ground by his feet but he gasped and flinched away. She reached out with her left hand and squatted on the ground. She picked up a stick from by his feet and beckoned him closer.

The boy looked confusedly at the girl, but obliged. He hesitantly snuck closer to the ground and towards the strange girl. She hobbled over and came closer to the boy. He gave a nervous gasp and watched as the girl began writing on the dirt with the stick.

With a firm grasp on the twig, the girl wrote in sloppy writing 12.

"Twelve...?" he said aloud.

She pointed her to self and rewrote over the numbers a couple of times.

He looked at her, still very confused. But before he said anything else, he noticed a black mark on her left arm, the one resting at her knee while her right wrote in the soil. Etched neatly in black ink was the number 012. He stared at it, not really fathoming a girl her age having a tattoo. But it clicked in that moment.

"Oh, that's your name?" he asked. "012?"

She blinked at him, rewrote the numbers, and pointed to herself. He nodded, understanding her attempt at communicating. She held out her stick for him to take and waited whilst staring intently into his green eyes.

He took the stick into his hand and wrote his name, *Will*. He pointed to himself as he looked back into her eyes.

012 smiled, nodding in understanding.

But Will still didn't understand why she was making them write instead of just talking.

"Can you not hear?" Will asked. "Are you deaf?"

012 blinked at him yet again. He sighed and wrote into the ground *Deaf?*.

She looked at him, confused. 012 had never been taught that she was deaf, so she didn't even recognize the word. She was only taught that her ears didn't work.

Grabbing the twig from his hand, she wrote *ears*, and then put an X over the word. Will still looked confused, clearly seeing that she did, in fact, have ear. She added the words *no hear*.

"Oh!" he said, getting it.

He grabbed the stick back and wrote *deaf means no hearing*.

The girl looked confused for a second. She was about to take the stick back from Will when he stood up abruptly. She looked up at him. His eyes were wide with alarm and fright. Unbeknownst to the girl, Will was hearing the small cracks of twigs breaking and the rustling of leaves nearby. She stood up with him, looking around for something moving in the distance.

"We have to go," he whispered to the deaf girl.

Without a second's hesitation, Will grabbed 012's hand and dragged her off while running away, still carrying the stick. She could barely keep up with him thanks to her bum knee paining her with every other step, but she could feel his terror seeping into her skin and knew that he wouldn't have run away from nothing.

They kept running until they came upon a small hut in the middle of the forest with a tattered sign reading *Castle Byers* atop it. Will had let go of her hand when they came close to it as he dove to the ground and crawled inside rapidly. She followed him inside without a second thought. Breathing heavily and gasping wildly, they both chose separate corners to curl up in. The two watched the thin veil that kept the hut enclosed through raspy breaths for any sign of the

monster stalking them.

By the time both of their breaths had return to normal, Will nodded at the girl, signaling that the coast was clear. Both heaved out sighs of relief. His hand finally unclenched around the stick he was still holding, and let it fall to the ground.

It was at this moment that 012 realized she was very cold. With only a thin hospital gown loosely tied to her back, she clutched her bump-ridden arms and shivered furiously in the corner of the shelter. She flinched as she felt a touch on her deathly cold arm. She gave a small gasp of surprise and looked up to see Will tapping her arm. He had scooted over closer to her.

"Here, I have this," he said, patting the sleeping bag on the ground. "It's pretty warm."

He started unzipping the sleeping bag and folded it open for her. It was a little sticky on the outside, but it was mostly untouched on the inside. He patted the inside again as a signal for her to crawl in. 012 hesitated for a moment, before starting to scuttle inside the sleeping bag. Once she had settled in and put her back against the pillow, she folded the top fold over her legs and held it tightly around her body. She made a sort of half-smile at Will, but still felt very cold.

They both just sat there in the cold darkness together, trying not to look at each other. Will's mind was racing with worry. Neither of them had any clue where they were or why there was a monster after them. They didn't know how to get out of whatever place they had stumbled into. Will certainly didn't know where this girl had come from or why she was here, but sharing this harrowing experience with someone his age made him feel a little bit better.

Will sat there, curled up in the opposite corner of the freezing girl, rocking slightly back and forth as he looked around his fort. A thought occurred to him: if his mother only knew that he had a girl in here with him... He laughed slightly at the idea of his mom freaking out, but his half-giggle turned into dead silence as the reality of his situation fell upon him.

He looked up from his knees to the shivering girl across from him.

"Do you think we're going to die here?" he asked in a small voice.

Though she couldn't hear his words, 012 could feel his sadness turning to hopelessness as it bled into her mind. He took her silence as a yes and buried his face into his knees.

012's face turned very concerned and sad as she looked at Will. He was beginning to hold back tears and wasn't doing a very good job of it. 012 tried to find something happy within herself to share with him, but his feelings were overwhelming her own. She began to feel tears stream down her face as well. 012 curved her mouth into a resilient smile, trying to fight the sadness, wiped the tears from her eyes, and tried to think of something happy. Anything remotely happy.

Her thoughts turned to her nurse that had been the kindest of all the adults in the lab. She thought of the nurse's warm smile, and the times when she used to sneak in an extra apple or bit of bread with her usual lunches. Next, she recalled her encounters with 011. Though they didn't really know each other that well, she felt like their connection with each other was inseparable.

But with these happy thoughts came the oppressive and intrusive reality that she couldn't see either of them right now.

A dismal gloom fell upon the inhabitants of Castle Byers that evening. The twin sets of tear-stained cheeks tried to stay awake for as long as they could that night, but eventually they both fell asleep one after the other by the early morning.

012's eyes shot open around seven the next morning. She sat up immediately in the sleeping bag. Her eyes searched frantically around the fort and saw Will had fallen asleep at her feet. But that wasn't what caught her attention. What had woken her up was a faint feeling of anxiety creeping into the pit of her stomach. She looked at Will, confused. He was asleep, so it couldn't be him. She carefully slipped her feet out of the sleeping bag and crawled stealthily towards the curtain. She poked her head out of the fort and looked around with wide eyes. Despite the morning hour, it was still very dark in this place. She couldn't see anyone else or anything moving

outside, but she could still feel something.

Regardless of her better judgement, she decided to go investigate.

Will woke up a couple minutes later, feeling very sore and groggy. He opened his eyes, expecting to see light streaming in through the cracks of the fort, but no such light shone through.

"Wha...?" he said, rubbing his eyes, blinking a couple of times. "It has to be morning by now."

He sat up and looked to the sleeping bag, expecting to see 012 still asleep, but he didn't. He looked around the fort and didn't see her anywhere. A sudden rush of panic washed over him as he rushed out of the fort on all fours. Will scrambled to his feet once he was out and immediately spotted the girl a couple feet from the fort. He ran over to her, startling her in the process, and began mumbling to her tons of angry questions. She just looked at him with a smile on her face and pointed at nothing.

He stopped his frantic questions as he heard something ring on his ears.

"Will?" an all too familiar voice called. "Will!"

"Johnathon?" Will asked.

"Will!" his mother called.

"Mom?!" he said, starting to feel relieved. He started running the direction of the voice, but 012 held him back by the vest. "What? That's my mom! She can get help; she can-"

But 012 shook her head. She pointed in the direction of the voices he was hearing.

He looked hopefully off in the distance, but didn't see anyone.

"Will!" Johnathon yelled.

"Will!" his mother called.

"But... they're here! I can hear them!" he said, spinning around, trying to catch a glimpse of his family.

He almost started crying, but 012 pulled him to close to the ground as she started drawing in the ground with her fingers.

She started by drawing a stick figure in the dirt, and then added another one right next to it. She drew a line underneath the two stick figures and pointed at them and then to the direction of the voices. Next, she drew two smaller stick figures standing underneath the line. She wrote next to them *Will* + 12 and pointed at him and then to herself.

Will stared at the crude drawing, not really understanding the meaning. But what he did get is that he could hear his family, but he just couldn't see them. He figured that the two on top of the line were his mom and his brother and wrote *Mom* and *Johnathon* next to the two stick figures. He looked to 012 who was peering at him, hoping for him to understand.

I can't see them, but I can hear them? he wrote. 012 nodded. *Do you know if they can hear us?* She shook her head, disappointed in herself.

He shook up the dirt where he had written, erasing it from the ground, but kept the drawing to look at, still trying to figure it out.

Joyce looked around her son's fort, thinking of a time when he would just be there sitting or drawing. But as she unveiled the curtain, whispering the secret password under her breath, she saw a cold, empty sleeping bag and taped up drawings within the hollow fort. Will was gone and his vitality had gone missing with him.

Johnathon looked at his mother when she heaved a frustrated sigh as she closed the curtain to the empty castle. He was holding it in better than his mom, that was for sure. His eyes fell upon the ground as some dust ruffled up in the air. He walked closer and squatted down next to the disturbance and saw a strange drawing on the ground.

"Hey... Mom?" he asked. "Was this here before?"

"What?" she asked, craning her neck over his shoulder. "No, I don't think-" Both of them locked eyes as they read the words next to the drawing.

"Will," they said in unison.

Joyce was dumbfounded, stuttering and almost crying in happiness and confusion. Really, she was just feeling about every contradictory emotion at that point.

"Will, my boy, he was here, Johnathon!" she said. "It says Will!"

"I know, Mom, but-"

"He was here," she said.

"Mom, that could've been here last week," Johnathon theorized.

"But you don't know that," she said, smiling as tears began welling up in her eyes. "It looks fresh! He was just here!"

"Ok, maybe he was here, but why wouldn't he just come back home?" he supposed.

"I don't know... Maybe he-"

"He didn't draw this," Johnathon said. "That's not his handwriting, see. And he's way better than stick figures."

"But he wrote 'Mom' and 'Johnathon', look!" she replied. "That's his writing, I know it."

"So... what does that mean?" Johnathon asked.

"I don't know... Will... He must not be alone," she said, looking into the eyes of her oldest son. "They did draw two people. And what does that say? Twelve?"

"Yeah, I think so," he said, trying to read the messy handwriting.

"Whoever this... this 'twelve' person is must be with him," she assumed. She stood up and started walking back towards the house.

"I'm calling Hopper."

"I don't think you have to..." Johnathon mumbled, seeing a car roll up. "Mom, cops."

"Whoa..." gaped Will as he opened the door to his house. He coughed briefly before stepping inside.

Everything was grey and black from the usual warm browns and tans he was used to. Twisted vines tangled throughout the house, covering almost every surface imaginable. This place, world- or wherever they had stumbled into- was dark and sticky, but strangely familiar.

He walked through the threshold of the door as 012 followed soon after, gazing and searching about. 012 stayed in the living room exploring as Will walked into his room. He went straight for his closet, hoping to find clothes that weren't wet or sticky so 012 could get warm. He fished out a red sweater and a pair of trousers that he hoped would work. When he walked back into the living room, he saw 012 sitting in the arm chair with wide eyes full of wonder.

"Here," he said, handing the clothes to the girl.

He set them into her lap. She looked at the pile for a second, then looked up at Will with a confused expression.

"Clothes," he explained.

He fiddled with the zipper on his vest and repeatedly unzipped and zipped it up again. He pointed back towards the bathroom in the house and beckoned her to follow him. She grabbed the clothes and followed him. As he opened the door to the bathroom, he gestured her inside. Hesitantly, she walked inside the small room, eyeing it cautiously. As she turned around to look at him, he shut the door.

Immediately, panic swung over 012. It seemed like she was being thrust into the small room back at Hawkins Lab. She dropped the clothes onto the floor. Her heart began racing as she stumbled backwards, falling over a root embedded into the floor. With a loud thump, her head struck the ledge of the bathtub. She yelped out in

pain and began crying on the floor.

The door swung open with Will standing at the threshold, but she didn't see him. 012's eyes were cemented shut as tears poured out of them. He bent down and tried to help, but as soon as he touched her, she started flailing wildly in protest as she grunted and screamed in panic.

Will didn't know what was going on or what happened. He just scooted back out of the door watching as 012 made seizure-like convulsions in the middle of his bathroom.

012 opened her eyes, expecting to see two guards dressed in white trying to take her away, but she just saw the old ceiling of a bathroom. Her nails raked down on the cold linoleum as she got her bearings. Her heartrate calmed down, realizing where she was and tried to sit up again. Her head swayed and felt monumentally heavier than before. She locked eyes with Will, who was staring at her with eyes full of horror. He scooted back even further, fearing she was going mad. 012 gasped as she felt his terror piercing her stomach. Making a small noise as she held out her hand, 012 got up slowly and tried to walk towards Will.

But he scrambled to his feet in a second and took off running out of the house.

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4. Chapter 4

He just ran. That was the only thing he could think of doing at that point. His heart was pounding into his throat as he relived the last minute of his life. He shouldn't have ever helped her. No, she was crazy and dangerous and weird and he was stupid to think she was friendly. He didn't even look back to see if she was following him. All he wanted was to get as far away from her as possible.

012 fell to her knees as Will ran away. It was partially because she didn't feel right and partially because she was upset. She really had conked her head hard on the bathtub. Her ears would've been ringing, but she could definitely feel them aching. She tried to stand up again, but her sense of balance was all out of whack. 012 couldn't see very well either; there were black spots littering her sight, and her head and ears were throbbing.

She definitely had a concussion, but she didn't know that.

Gazing down at the floor with a broken heart, she saw the pile of clothes had come unfolded. She sniffed and wiped her eyes on the back of her hand. She changed out of her hospital gown and into the new clothes slowly, minding her sore head. After a couple stumbled attempts on putting pants on, she was fully dressed and discarded the hospital gown on the floor of the bathroom. The itchy, knit, red sweater was much warmer around her arms than the thin, paper-like material of the gown.

Her head was still throbbing, but what hurt the most was the look on Will's face before he ran away. He was afraid of her, deeply, truly terrified of 012. She could feel it. She could still feel it lingering in her stomach.

She had felt this feeling before.

Several weeks after the failed experiment three years prior, the friend of the scientist that died got a terrible idea. Now that 012 was blacklisted from experiments by Dr. Brenner, barely anyone paid attention to her. So in his mind, why would it matter if 012 just

mysteriously died? He didn't think it was fair that his friend had to die while his murderer just walked free without any repercussions. His friend had a wife, kids even. This child had nothing to her name.

Why would anyone care if she just died? he reasoned to himself.

Days leading up to his plot, he secretly stole a syringe and vial from one of the medical stations in the Lab. Potassium chloride should do the trick- very lethal and very painful.

Today, he decided, this would be the child's last day.

He sauntered down the hallways of Hawkins Lab with a confident smirk on his mouth, but flitting eyes. With sweaty palms, one of which firmly grasped the drug and the syringe, he began to approach 012's room. He was reaching for the door handle with such an intense stare it was as if would die if he looked away or even blinked.

"Excuse me."

The scientist jumped at the sudden voice. He looked over his shoulder, one hand still on the handle. It was 012's nurse carrying a clipboard.

"Sorry," she said, a little suspicious of why he was so jumpy. She flipped through a couple pages of her clipboard and said, "I didn't think 012 was scheduled for anything today."

"Last minute change," he replied a little too quickly. "I just need to run some... some tests. I guess you didn't get the memo."

"Fraid I didn't..." she said, shifting her hips to get a better look at what he was holding in his other hand so tightly. "Is that medication?" She pointed to his hand. She started tapping the clipboard on her hand absentmindedly.

"Oh, I... Um, yes," he spit out. "It's, um, a... a sleeping aid. Yes, a sleeping aid." He was fumbling a bit, trying to hide the vial from her view.

"It's two pm," she said, now suspecting his intentions were something other than giving the girl medication. She took a step closer to the

door, trying to body block him from opening it. "I'm gonna need some authorization from Dr. Brenner before you-"

Almost as if it was slow motion, the scientist's clammy grip on the vial faltered and it shattered on the floor. He froze. The nurse slowly bent down and did not break eye contact with the now pale scientist. Seeing the glass remains and spilled liquid, she looked down for a split second and saw the label on the vial intact on a large glass shard.

"Potassium chloride..." she breathed, choking on the words. She made fleeting eye contact with the scientist before whipping her head around to yell, "Security!"

Without a moment's hesitation, the scientist kicked her in the stomach and raced his hand back to the door handle to open it. The clipboard flew against the wall.

"I guess I'll just do it myself," he muttered angrily.

The nurse writhed on the ground, unable to form words as the wind was knocked right out of her.

Swinging the door open, blood pumping with adrenaline, he stepped into the room and looked directly into the eyes of his friend's killer. 012 was crouched under her bed, staring with wide eyes full of terror at the man before her. She had sensed his hostile intent from outside and responded immediately. His eyes seemed to go blank as the rage inside of him took over as the scientist lunged for the girl cowering under her bed. She slid back deeper under the bed, but he reached further, grabbed her wrist, and began to drag her out on the tiled floor. Noises and cries of panic dripped from her mouth as she kicked and struggled wildly to try to escape her attacker's grip. He threw 012 to her feet, holding her wrists with an inaccurately strong grasp for the averagely-built man. He felt like a bully about to roast tiny ants with a magnifying glass as he looked at the terrified child before him.

012's feet were barely touching the floor as she looked up in panic into the eyes of the man suspending her by the wrists. She tried to make him let go and leave, but she was too terrified to concentrate

hard enough for her influence to be fulfilled. He growled through his teeth as he stared at 012, fully enraged at her existence. He let his grip of her wrists go for a moment, but before even a second passed, both of his hands were clenched tightly around her throat. She gasped at the sudden cut off of her air supply.

As the scientist began to strangle 012, the nurse had regained her breath and burst into the room. But she froze as she leaped over the threshold of the door, staggering a bit as the inertia lingered at the sudden stop. Her heart racing with adrenaline nearly stopped.

Terror.

Complete and utter terror had filled the entire room via 012's tele-empathetic abilities.

The scientist was getting the full-blast of it. He couldn't release his grip on her throat because he was petrified, but his heart was pounding, pounding, pounding harder and harder with each second. He couldn't look away from the girl turning blue. He was sweating, droplets sliding down from his forehead in pairs at regular intervals. 012 was doing all she could to terrify this attacker before her as she began to lose consciousness. Black spots were appearing in her vision. She almost passed out when the iron grasp around her throat was released slowly.

012 dropped to the floor, gasping and wheezing for air. She put a hand on her throat and propped herself up on the cold tile floor with the other. Minutes passed before she could breathe normally again. 012 gazed across the room as her eyes fell on her attacker. He was lying on the ground, motionless.

He was dead- literally scared to death. His heart gave up at the pressure. It just couldn't pump blood fast enough.

She tried to gasp, but she winced in return at sharp pain of trying to make noise. But she realized she could still feel someone's terror in the room. She locked eyes with the nurse standing in the doorway. It wasn't 012 making the nurse afraid; she was feeling it all on her own. The nurse took a hesitant step backwards and then ran out of the room as fast as she could.

012 burst into tears, too overwhelmed to hold them in.

She never forgot about how terrible it felt to have others be afraid of her, especially people she thought she could trust.

Recalling these painful memories, 012 began crying without really realizing it.

Will thought long and hard as he sprinted away, trying to convince himself that he was an idiot for trusting 012. But, the more he thought about it, the worse he felt for running away from her. He had no idea what happened to her, so maybe he just assumed something completely false. She hadn't done anything that strange before. And on top of that, she was the only person he had seen in this dark world.

Immediately, he stopped running.

"I have to go back," he realized, whipping around and going back home to retrieve 012.

He was panting and heaving as he stopped outside of his house. He bent over and rested his hands on his knees. When he caught his breath, Will stood back up and stared at his house, still wondering if he should really go inside.

The atmosphere changed dramatically, and everything became silent, except for the occasional wind howling or the flutter of rustling leaves. The air suddenly chilled about ten degrees cooler as the wind picked up, blasting strange floating particles into his face.

"Aw, yuck!" he exclaimed, wiping the particles and goo from his face.

Will couldn't help but feel the hairs on the back of his neck rising as a low chatter-y growl echoed through the thin air. He inhaled sharply with a quick breath, gasping at the thought of the monster. He froze. Everything sped up around him as Will flitted his eyes all around, trying to pinpoint the location of the monster. He felt dizzy, like this wasn't actually happening. He couldn't see the monster, but he could still hear its growls and chatters. In fact, it sounded like it was

coming from his backyard.

Will was about to turn tail and run away when he suddenly remembered why he was there in the first place.

"012!" he breathed, realizing she was probably still inside.

Despite every sense inside of him telling him to run away, he ran straight into his house. He stopped abruptly as he went through the front door, eyes racing around trying to find where she was. He saw her still sitting on the bathroom tile. The growls were getting louder. He sprinted into the bathroom, grabbed her hand and dragged her away right as he heard his back door creak open. His heart was racing, her head was pounding. She didn't really understand what was happening when she was suddenly lurched from off the floor and into a full-on sprint, but she could feel his fear pierce into her stomach. 012 whimpered quietly, trying to understand why he was still afraid of her as they tore away from his house.

Within seconds, they were dodging and evading trees and rocks and branches through the forest next to his house. Running, running. He couldn't stop. Will's breath couldn't keep up with his pace, and neither could 012. They had been running for quite a while when 012's limit was finally reached. She slowed down, making him slower as well.

012 nearly collapsed on the ground as both of them came to a halt. Her head was swimming and she couldn't find which way was up. Stumbling a bit, her legs gave out and she fell to her knees.

"012!" Will panted through heavy breaths.

He sat down next to her as she wheezed through tired lungs. Her eyes were shaking as they stared at the cold dirt.

Will noticed a small patch of red located on the back of her head. His brows furrowed as he took a closer look.

"You're bleeding..." he mumbled, shifting awkwardly. He didn't really know how to help her, especially after he totally betrayed her earlier.

After about a minute of gasps, both had regained their normal breath

and 012's brain had calmed down for the most part. The lingering headache intensified, but she could see straight again.

012 slowly got to her feet and stared at Will below. Will got up as well and tried to point to where she was bleeding on her head, but she flinched and jumped back. He backed away.

His eyes shifted to the ground and he squatted down to write a message.

Your head is bleeding.

She looked down, reading the ground and let out a tiny gasp as her hand immediately felt around the back of her head. She winced as she found the spot where her head had struck the bathtub. 012 squatted down closer to Will to write back.

Why run away?

He didn't know which instance she meant, to be honest. He was a little ashamed of that, but he wrote back anyway.

I heard the monster. He paused before writing again. *But before, I was scared.* He couldn't make eye contact with her.

She touched his arm gently as an apologetic feeling flooded his system. He looked at her face. She looked upset, like she had done something wrong. He snatched his hand away from her a little too quickly, making her jump, and shook the dirt up to erase the writing so he could write over it.

No, it was my fault. You don't need to be sorry.

012's mouth curved into a smile as she read the message. A new feeling flooded over Will: joy.

I got scared when Will close door, she wrote him.

I'm sorry, he admitted. *I didn't know.*

They both smiled at each other.

Friends?

012 blinked at the word etched into the ground. She didn't recognize it.

What is that? she asked, pointing to the word above her writings.

He pointed at the word *friends* and looked at her with an eyebrow raised. She nodded her head.

He thought for a moment and erased the ground. He didn't really know how to explain it, but he gave it a shot.

Friend = someone you want to be with, someone you'd do anything for.
He scratched his head, hoping that made sense.

She smiled at him again and nodded, sharing another wave of happiness with him.

He smiled back at her, but his mind was still burning with questions about her. Where had she come from? Why is her name 012? Why didn't she know what a friend is? And why could she make him feel emotions? He didn't really need to answers to these questions just yet, but he knew he needed to ask them eventually.

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5. Chapter 5

The two strolled through the forest till late evening when they finally came upon other buildings in town. Will shuddered at the sight of the dark Hawkins. The place he grew up in was now a dim, eerie, and mysterious horror scene. The sight of the town in such dilapidation, clouded in a murk haze with barely any light, and strange spores creeping through the air was enough to send a chill down Will's spine. And even 012, who had never really seen outside of the lab, knew that this reality was wrong.

"Hello?" Will whispered a bit hesitantly as he stared at the desolate town. "Anyone here?"

012's eye's scanned scene for any sign of life as the two kept on walking towards the buildings.

Will spotted a payphone on the side of the road. He walked over to it quickly and began patting down his pockets, hoping to find some loose change. 012 looked at him strangely. She was very curious as to what he was doing. Will looked at her and realized she was wearing a pair of his pants.

"Pockets..." he said to her. He scratched his head as he looked around for something to write on. "Oh!" he said, thinking of an idea.

He held out his hand. She scrunched her eyebrows and hesitantly held her hand out.

He flipped her hand palm up and began tracing the letters spelling pockets onto her palm. When he was finished, he dug his hand into his pocket to tuck it outside, showing her what he meant.

012 felt around on her borrowed pants as Will did, searching for a pocket, still not quite sure what it was she was doing. She found two small coins in the back left pocket and presented them to Will. He took them with a smile on his face and turned to use the payphone. He began by dialing his home phone number, mentally thanking himself that his mom made him memorize it in case of emergencies.

This was definitely an emergency.

Though they both had been to his house in this strange, dark world, Will hoped somehow that he would reach his mother wherever she was.

As he dialed and put the phone to his ear, 012 turned around and felt a bit dizzy, still shaken up and in pain from her spill in the bathroom.

"Mom?" Will spoke into the phone.

"Hello...?" answered the phone.

"Mom! It's me, I'm-"

"Hello? Lonnie... Hopper?" she asked. "Who is this?"

012 caught sight of something moving in the distance and tilted her head to get a better look. She gasped audibly and grabbed Will's vest in surprise.

He whipped his head around and stared at a shadow in the shape of the monster moving behind a window in the building opposite of them.

He stopped trying to talk to his mother, frozen in fear.

"Will? Will?" she asked desperately.

He dropped the phone from his hand. He could hear his mother crying through the muffled static.

"We need to go..." he whispered, grabbing 012's hand as they fled off deeper into the town.

The phone just hung there off the hook. Joyce's voice still rang through the unholy silence of the twisted town. As the monster crept closer to the payphone, its curiosity piqued at the strange noise coming from the device. It bent over and inspected the phone dangling from the machine.

"What have you done to my boy? Give me back my boy!"

A snarl escaped from the monster's mouth. She screamed on the other end as it ripped the phone from the cord attaching it to the machine, leaving Joyce with a surged line.

The two scared kids went back to Castle Byers after their encounter with the monster. 012 was feeling worse than before and threw up outside the fort by the time they returned. She crawled inside the sleeping bag and laid down to let the spinning world pause. Will sat in silence for a while, just watching his feet. It wasn't until later that night whilst 012 was asleep he found the courage to go outside his fort and into his house. He wanted to call his mom one more time.

His cold and clammy fingers dialed upon the sticky numbers. The phone needed a bit of extra effort at first to spin due to the ooze covering and sticking it in place, but he eventually got it working and dialed his home phone number. He briefly thought it was strange to be dialing his own phone number in his house, but he picked up the receiver and put it to his ear. It was wet with slime, but he heard a faint dial tone.

The line picked up, but he couldn't hear anyone on the other side. After a couple of seconds of static, he finally spoke, "Mom?"

But he couldn't hear anything but static. He hung up the phone, disheartened. He left the phone and walked silently around his house, briefly pausing in the hallway leading towards his room. He tried to flick on the light switch a couple of times, but it didn't do anything.

He still couldn't understand where he was. This was his home. He was in his fort a couple of minutes ago. And that was Hawkins outside... but it wasn't somehow. It was like he and this girl had fallen into another dimension. And there were monsters here. Terrifying monsters.

He walked into his room and out of habit turned his light switch, but it didn't work again. His bed was damp and sticky, like everything else in this place. He reached out to his old stereo almost remembering the feeling of listening to one of his favorite songs for the first time with his brother. A smile crept its way to his face as he turned a knob on the radio in hope of it working.

Only static.

"Should I stay or should I go now..." he muttered, singing quietly. "If I go there will be trouble; if I stay there will be double."

His hand lightly touched the various trinkets upon his window ledge as he walked towards the corner of his room, humming his song.

"Will? Is that you?" he heard a faint voice call out.

He spun around. "Mom?" he asked.

A low growl sent Will into panic mode as he saw a shadow moving outside his window. Will leaped into his closet and shut the door. Moments later he heard footsteps sprinting off into the woods. Cautiously, he opened the door to his closet and stepped out.

"Should I stay or should I go now..." he muttered once again, resigning to go back to Castle Byers.

012 was still fast asleep when he got back. Will sat down opposite her and hugged his cold, bony knees and closed his eyes. He didn't get much sleep that night. He knew he had heard his mother's voice again.

By the time 012 had woken up the next morning, her headache was almost unbearable. She couldn't see clearly and the spots in her vision were still there. She held her head as she sat up from the warm sleeping bag, head spinning. Her insides felt weird again, like she needed to throw up. She sprint-crawled out of the fort and vomited close by the entrance.

"Not feeling too good, huh?" Will said, sniffing. He wiped away a tear falling from his left eye.

Now that her insides were calming down, she could feel Will's sadness radiating like a cold mass inside her.

He was thinking of his friends and how he wanted to be playing Dungeon and Dragons with them again. He wanted to hear their voices over the walkie and he wanted to be Will the Wise again with all of his magic to aid him in his quests. But he was stuck in this

place with a strange girl, powerless, and with no way out.

Feel bad, she wrote on the dirt ground of the fort.

Her face read misery and exhaustion with a hint of starvation. He wasn't doing much better.

Slowly, the two migrated into the house after the smell of vomit became too much to bear. Will noticed both of them coughing a little more frequently than usual. The strange particles in the air seemed to be affecting their breathing. Neither of them felt safe in the open living room. They tried staying in the various bedrooms of the house, but nothing made them feel secure.

They were both exceedingly thirsty and hungry. In his pantry, there were some leftover snacks but they were stale. He tried turning on the faucet but it only let out a spurt of ooze-water before making a strange sound and he turned it off. Will checked inside his refrigerator and found rotten fruits and vegetables, but much to his delight, there was a gallon of tepid water untouched from the dimension's slime and vines. The two took turns drinking furiously and survived off of the various stale crackers and chips from the pantry. But none of it was enough to fully sate the two starving children.

After their gloriously disappointing feast, Will returned to his mission of finding a hiding spot. With the help of a very weak 012, they moved over a small chest to reveal a cabinet within the wall. He felt at ease there.

It took some convincing for 012 to crawl inside with him due to the claustrophobic nature of the cabinet, but he left the doors cracked to appease her. Besides, there was much more to be afraid of in this dark place.

"Will, are you here?" a whisper broke through the silence.

Will's face lit up at the sound of his mother's voice. 012 looked up at him, wondering what he was doing.

"Mom?" he asked, opening the cabinet door to see if she was there. It

was just a cold, gloomy, empty living room.

012 could feel his relief and a separate aching feeling of anxiety coming from somewhere else.

"Ok, good, good, good," his mother said.

His mother asked him to blink through the lights he was somehow manipulating on the other side, once for yes, two for no. He didn't know how he was doing it, but he could feel the electricity in the lights his mother was holding and spoke into them.

"Baby, I need to know... are you alive?"

"Yes," he whispered, speaking into the current.

A flood of relief washed into 012.

"Are you safe?"

He looked into 012's eyes and replied, "No..."

"I need to know where to find you, honey. Where... where are you?" He could hear her speaking through tears. "Can you tell me where you are? Please, baby. I need to find you. Tell me what to do! Please, Will..."

His mother's voice slowly faded out.

"Mom..." he whispered to himself, feeling a tear fall from his eye.

012 could sense that he was communicating with someone from outside their dimension. He didn't seem scared of the person he was talking to, so she wasn't worried.

Not even an hour later, they could hear the monster's footsteps somewhere near the house. It was at the very worst time his mother's voice rang into his ears.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"Right here..." he whispered, barely even making any noise.

"I don't know what that means," she said, confused. "I need you to tell me what to do. What should I do?"

He could hear the creaking of the wood in his house. He held his breath. The monster was back.

"How do I get to you? How do I find you? What should I do?"

He breathed, "Run."

A snarl escaped from the monster's mouth. Fear was radiating into 012, she could sense that the monster was near. They both clutched their knees tightly, not even daring to breathe again.

There was a huge crash sound next to them. They both about jumped out of their skin, but the evil presence of the monster felt gone after the crash. They both shivered inside the cupboard, too afraid and too tired after a cold day to move into the fort to sleep. But sleep wouldn't take over either of the two kids that night. 012's migraine kept her awake and restless, and Will was too terrified to even think about sleeping.

He just kept muttering to himself the whole night his favorite song, "So come on and let me know, should I stay or should I go?"

At one point during the night, 012's aching head perked up. The experiment she ran away with, she could feel her trying to get in contact somehow. She wanted to go back into her black abyss to find her, but she couldn't focus enough to enter. Her mind was ripe with worry and fear leaving it far too clouded to enter the proper state of mind needed to go back.

Out of the darkness of the cabinet, a hand grabbed his arm. He jumped slightly and opened his eyes even though he wasn't asleep. To his surprise, 012 had a sort of half-smile on her face as she began writing on his palm.

H-E-L-P-C-O-M-I-N-G

His eyes widened as he realized what the message said. He grabbed her palm and wrote back, *W-H-E-N*. She frowned and replied, grabbing his hand again, *D-O-N-T-K-N-O-W*. She paused briefly and

wrote again, *S-O-O-N*.

The next morning they both stumbled out of the cupboard with sore legs and backs. Will liked the security of their hiding place, but it wasn't too practical. He knew he could do better.

012 began wandering around the house again, making her way into Will's older brother's room. Here, she could feel a residual feeling of anger and sadness. She was suddenly taken over by a spell of coughing which lurched her body onto the bed for support. She could feel her head pounding and her stomach was aching violently. Her eyes felt like they were being hammered inside her skull. She laid down on the bed and almost fainted from the sudden rush of weakness.

Will came running in when he heard her coughing and saw her sprawled out on the bed, looking up at the ceiling. She could feel his footsteps from the vibrations on the ground and looked up vaguely to see him. Worry was stabbing into her stomach, making her feel even worse and mewled in pain, scrunching up like a ball on the bed. Will stood there, not knowing what to do or how to help, but she was clearly not feeling good. He ran outside of the room to fetch her what was left of the water jug he found and another bag of snacks, thinking she might be hungry or thirsty.

W-H-A-T-S-W-R-O-N-G, he spelled out in her hand.

H-U-R-T, she replied.

He looked at her head and saw the deep gash had turned into a purple-black scab around her hair. That didn't look too good. He felt her forehead and found her hot to the touch, which was strange because it was freezing in this realm. She desperately needed a doctor and quick. He sat beside her and tried to comfort her for a while.

Eventually, he convinced her to move to Castle Byers because it was safer than out in the open of the house. Very slowly, he helped her walk to the fort behind the house and laid her down in the sleeping bag. He went back inside to grab the water and snacks in case she needed them.

He was almost outside when he could hear the all-too-familiar heavy footsteps of the monster walking towards him in the distance. He almost froze in panic but decided to move to the opposite side of the house towards the front door. As he passed the living room and grabbed the door leading to the outside, he could faintly hear his favorite song playing.

He stopped briefly and called out, "Mom?"

"Will?" answered back Joyce.

The footsteps were getting louder and louder and all he wanted to do was grab his mom into a big hug and escape from this hell he was in. He whimpered out, "Mom, please..." as he exited his house. He didn't hear a reply and called out again, "Mom?"

"I'm here! I'm here!" she said.

"Mom!"

"Will!"

He was standing on the front porch about to run around to the back as the monster crept closer towards the house, but something strange was appearing on the outside wall of his house. There was a thin membrane of red, veiny skin-like matter opening in the wall. He walked over to it curiously and saw a vague figure of his mother inside the house.

"Mom!" he exclaimed, running to the opening.

"Oh, thank god, baby!" she said, putting her hand on the membrane, trying to reach him.

The growling was growing nearer and nearer.

"Will?" he asked.

"Mom, it's coming!" he yelled, turning around to try and catch a glimpse of the monster's location.

"Tell me where you are? How do I get to you?"

"it's like home, but it's dark- so dark and it's cold! Mom? Mom!"

"Listen to me! I swear I'm gonna get to you, okay?" she reassured him through tears, "But right now, I need you to hide!"

"Mom, please!" he cried, hoping somehow he'd save her from this horrible place.

The monster was almost out of the woods, coming towards him. The membrane separating the two began growing smaller and smaller.

"No, no listen. Listen, I will find you, but you have to run now! Run, run!" she yelled.

He took off running towards Castle Byers with the water and snacks in hand, hoping he wasn't too late to be seen by the monster. He dove in and slid to the ground, scaring 012 in the process. But he knew that they were close to finding a way out of this place. He had seen it! If only he could find a way to open one of those and crawl through it! Then 012 could get the medical help that she needed; then they'd finally be safe and back home where they belonged.

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6. Chapter 6

They had run out of food and water. Their clothes were perpetually wet in the freezing temperatures of the alternate dimension. 012 was fading in and out of consciousness every other minute. They were both shivering and coughing violently.

It wasn't looking good for the two inter-dimensional travelers.

The only thing that kept Will going was the fact that his Mom was coming for him. He kept singing his favorite song so that he wouldn't lose that hope he so desperately clung to.

Another voice came to him in the dark, sticky version of Castle Byers. He didn't recognize it, but it didn't matter at that point. Help was coming.

"Hurry..." was all he could muster at the moment.

A growl made him jump minutes later, stopping his feeble attempt at singing. He couldn't see the monster, it was too dark, but he could hear it circling the fort. His heart was racing in his throat. He grasped the unresponsive girl's hand in a futile attempt at solace.

There was a crash.

He put his hands over his face to block whatever had intruded and screamed.

With a final pound on Will's chest, he woke up with a gasp, looking quite dreadful. Joyce was clutching his cold body, crying and rejoicing that her boy was alive. Hopper was already getting the oxygen mask to put on him.

Disoriented and weak, Will looked into his mom's eyes and asked, "012? Where's... 012?"

"012?" she asked, wiping away a tear from her eyes. "Wha- I don't understand... What's 012?"

"The girl," he replied.

Hopper put the mask over Will's face and Joyce began looking around. There were other dead bodies in the library where they had found him. Barbra Holland was there among the skeletons. But tucked away into the corner surrounded by vines was a small figure with a tendril stuck down her throat, just like Will.

"Hopper... the girl! Over there! She's still alive!" Joyce cried, pointing at her.

Hopper yanked the tendril out her mouth, shooting it on the ground as he did to Will's. They immediately began doing compressions on her chest. Will was lying down next to her. He moved his head in order to see her, breathing shakily and began praying for her to wake up as he did.

We're almost out... Come on, 012. Breathe. We're saved now, he kept thinking, trying to will her to wake up.

"Come on... come on!" Hopper yelled, continuing the third round of compressions. "Wake up!"

A second hoarse and gasping breath echoed in the dark room. They hadn't brought a second mask for her to wear, but Hopper put his safety suit mask over her face for some protection at least. The two picked up both children, Hopper with the girl and Joyce with her son, and began walking back towards the exit of the Upside Down.

Will and 012 were finally safe.

The two terribly sick children were whisked away in ambulances and taken to the nearest hospital. Dr. Brenner was dead. The laboratory was in shambles in terms of leadership and man power. But it was only a matter of time before they found out where 012 was.

Joyce rode in the ambulance with her son while Hopper road with the little girl. The EMTs on the scene asked him all sorts of questions about her health that he had no idea how to answer. Once in the hospital, the children were placed on warm fluids to get back the nutrients they had lost during their week in the Upside Down. Upon

further inspection, the doctors found no internal bleeding inside of her brain, and her head wound was disinfected and dressed properly with gauze to help stop the gash from bleeding. They also dressed the children's various cuts and scrapes acquired in the rough terrain.

Their hospital rooms neighbored each other, and this being the most popular case in the entire town, most of that side of the floor was moved to different areas in the hospital and little to no visitors were allowed, except of course friends and family.

Hopper tried to stay in the girl's room but frequently checked in on Joyce and Will. It was late in the afternoon of the third day of their stay in the hospital. Hopper was dozing off in the chair next to her bed with his hat over his face. He could hear Joyce's voice through the walls. He couldn't really make out what she was saying, but he was glad everything was sort of back to normal.

Hopper felt this strange sensation in the pit of his stomach. His heart rate picked up and sweat started falling from his brow. His eyes shot open to see the darkness of the inside of his hat. He pulled it off and almost started hyperventilating. He almost felt like he was going through a weird withdrawal of his medication.

"What the...?" he said, extremely confused and almost... scared. He was scared? But of what?

His eyes turned to the figure in the bed. He hadn't noticed before, but she had woken up and was staring at him, absolutely terrified.

"Oh, you're awake," he said, breathless. His heart was pounding in his ears. He tried to stand up, but his head started spinning, so he just fell back into his chair. "What the hell is happening...?!" he cried out.

The girl was inching closer and closer to the back of her bed, pulling tight the various tubes and cords that kept her stable.

"No, no, it's ok," he said to her, trying to calm her down. "I'm ok, you don't need to be afraid. My name's Hopper, Chief Hopper. I'm the chief of police and I'd like to ask you a couple questions if that's ok?"

His heart rate finally began slowing, but the girl was still cowering in

the corner of her bed.

He stood up, creeping closer to her. "What's your name?" he asked softly.

The girl scrunched her eyes and curled up into a ball, shaking nervously. A pang of fear rushed into his gut, but he couldn't understand why his body was reacting this way to the girl.

"Sh, sh, it's ok," he said, moving the chair closer to the side of the hospital bed. "I'm not going to hurt you."

She opened her eyes briefly, seeing that he was coming closer and made the smallest noise of terror. She kept inching farther and farther up the bed, trying to get away from him.

"Can you tell me your name?" he asked again, sitting beside her.

She stopped shaking momentarily and fell limp in her bed. He started to rush over to help, but he was completely frozen. Suddenly, his body was moving on its own. He began walking awkwardly out of the door and into the hallway.

"Hop?" Joyce called from Will's room, seeing him leave the room rather strangely.

Inside he was screaming for help, but he physically couldn't say anything. Once he was about ten steps into the hallway, the sensation left him and he regained control of his movement. He fell down to his knees in the hallway, brushing a hand through his hair in confusion and bewilderment.

"What the *hell* was that?!" he muttered to himself.

"Hop? What's wrong?" asked Joyce, coming to the door of her boy's room to see him on the ground.

He got up swiftly, putting his hat on and looked at Joyce with a strange expression.

"Hop, you're scaring me, what's wrong?" she repeated, looking more worried.

"She...! She did something!" he said, not quite knowing how to put what he felt into words.

"Wh-what? Hold on," she said, talking with her hands. "Back up, what happened?"

"She made me feel afraid and then I was walking out of the room!" he exclaimed, almost exasperated.

"What?" Joyce asked, not understanding the least bit of what he was saying.

"But it wasn't me walking out of the room!" he said a little too loudly. Noticing his tone, he quieted down and said, "I think she has some sort of..." He spoke at almost a whisper, "*powers...*"

"Like 011?" she replied in the same low whisper, putting a hand over her mouth.

He nodded. "But she's too freaked out to answer any of my questions."

A small voice rang out of the quiet, "Well, she is deaf." A couple of hoarse coughs followed.

"What did you say?" Hopper asked, looking over inside Will's room.

"She's deaf," he repeated quietly. "We had to write to each other on the ground while we were-" A coughing fit came over the small boy.

"Sh, sh," his mother said, rushing to his side. "Don't strain yourself."

Hopper began searching for scraps of paper to write on and ran into the small room. He had found a pad of paper near the sink in Will's room, pulled a pen from his pocket, and left without another word.

He opened the door and saw the girl shrink back in terror at the sudden intrusion. She had a tiny droplet of blood hanging from her nose, just like he had seen with 011. He felt a pang of fear in his gut again but brushed it off. He began scribbling onto the pad of paper, tearing it off and handing it as calmly as possible to her. His eyes were burning with a mixture of curiosity and excitement.

I'm not here to hurt you. I'm a friend, it said.

She looked at him with shaking eyes and hesitantly took the paper from him. Reading it, she recognized the word 'friend.' A half-smile appeared on her face at seeing the word. She thought of Will and looked to Hopper in worry. She looked around, searching for something to write with. Seeing this, he handed her his pen.

Where is Will? she wrote under his writing in sloppy, shaky letters. She handed it back to him.

He pondered for a moment, thinking about whether or not he should answer that. He scribbled a while before returning the paper to her.

If I tell you, will you answer a couple of questions for me? it read.

She didn't move briefly, thinking. After a couple of seconds, she nodded at him, handing back the paper.

He began writing down his questions hurriedly on the paper.

What's your name? Where do you live? Do you have any family I can contact for you?

She didn't take long answering the questions.

Name = 012, bad place, no one. She hesitated a bit at the last question, not knowing how to answer it. She had her Papa, but her Papa didn't want her anymore. She liked the nurse that used to take care of her, but she didn't know her name or anything like that.

Hopper read her responses quickly and scribbled down the most important of his many questions.

Are you related to 011? Do you have special abilities?

Her heart felt a pang of anxiety as she read his questions again. She didn't know what the third word meant, but she knew what 011 was. The girl that she had escaped the laboratory with, she was called 011. And for the second question, she didn't know how to describe her abilities since they came naturally to her, but she knew she wasn't like other people. And 011 wasn't like other people, either.

She wrote down yes to both questions.

Right as he received the paper from the girl, a group of people burst through the door.

"Excuse me, sir, this room is under the jurisdiction of the Hawkins National Laboratory," explained a woman in a suit who seemed to be the one in charge of the group. "Please kindly exit the room as you are fraternizing with our private and intellectual property."

"Property?" he scoffed. "She's just a scared little kid!"

"Don't make me ask again," she said in a low, threatening tone. She began ordering the other people in the room around. "The asset must be returned to our custody. See to it that the proper paperwork is signed so we can start transport as soon as possible."

Hopper stood up, boiling with anger as he stuffed the piece of paper into his jacket pocket.

"You can't just-" he began to say.

"I'd like to remind you, Chief, of your agreement with us," she interrupted instantly. "We've allowed you access to our facility to bring the boy back to his mother for your silence. You even helped secure our asset. Right now, you're in good standing with us. We have no reason for quarrel. You wouldn't want that to change, now would you?"

His face was turning red with rage as he looked into the cold eyes of the woman before him. It took every fiber of his being not to punch her in the face. Without a word, he left the room, with one last glance at the little girl in the hospital bed staring at him with confused and pleading eyes.

As he left the room he heard the woman say, "Smart decision."

He stormed into the room adjacent absolutely furious and pulled Joyce away from her son to talk down the hall.

"What the hell, Hopper?" she asked, a bit angry. "What's wrong?"

"They're back," he said in a quiet, controlled voice. "They already found her."

"Found who?"

"012," he said. "They're taking her back to the lab."

"They can't do that! They almost got her killed!" she said.

"Yeah, they kinda can," he said. He laughed darkly, angry at the cruelty of the situation. "They called her 'an asset,' 'property.' Christ, Joyce, she's not even human to them!"

"What can we do? Can we-"

"We can't do anything..." he said solemnly. "We already made a deal with them, and they're not too keen on making another one."

She looked at Hopper helplessly. "There's got to be some way-"

"No, Joyce, it's over," he said angrily. "Forget it, that's what we agreed to."

"There's got to be laws for this kinda stuff. Reckless endangerment? Child endangerment? Some way we can get her away-"

"Forget it, Joyce," he said sternly, raising his voice a bit. "There's nothing we can do."

"What're they going to do to her?" Joyce asked in a small, haunted voice.

He didn't say anything for a moment. "I need to take a walk." He began walking down the hall towards the elevator.

Back in 012's room, she was surrounded by unfamiliar faces and shared her feelings of unease with the room. Out of the group of people, emerged a woman who sat beside her, holding a small chalkboard.

Remember me? it read.

As 012 looked into the eyes of the woman, she recognized her as the nurse that had taken care of her all those years. It felt like they had been apart for years. 012's face turned into a smile and she nodded her. The woman smiled back and erased the writing from the chalkboard to write a new message.

We're going home, she wrote.

012's smile faded in an instant and she sat back in her bed and looked away from the woman.

The various people in the room began their appointed tasks, tracking down doctors and hospital security. The woman in charge of this operation stayed in the room, sitting cross-legged in a chair by the door, staring at 012 coldly. Her nurse kept trying to talk to 012 with the chalkboard, but she simply refused to read anything. Finally, her nurse gave up and went to talk to the woman in charge.

Minutes later, 012 was moved to a room away from Will, but still on the same floor. She was issued a security guard outside her door at all times. The hospital was firm in not releasing the girl into their custody until the next morning, which pissed off the woman in the chair. She left the room to take a smoke break outside, leaving 012 alone with her nurse.

Hopper was smoking outside when the woman he had talked to earlier asked for a light. Absentmindedly, he pulled out his lighter and handed it to the woman. She lit a cigarette in the cold evening and drew in a large breath, holding it in for a second before exhaling grey smoke.

"Thanks," she said. "You know, it's better for all if we take it back."

"Not it. *She*," he corrected, taking back his lighter from the woman and putting it back in his jacket. "She's a living person. A little girl with feelings and a future."

"No more than a weapon," she responded nonchalantly, taking in another breath of smoke. "If it ever got out, there would be a panic. World governments would get involved... Really, it's kinder to it to come back with us. It'll be safe and cared for."

Hopper held in his anger and clenched his jaw at his annoyance with this woman. He chuckled and said sarcastically, "Really good job you were doing. Caring, and all."

"Accidents happen," she sneered, narrowing her eyes. She took another long breath before continuing. "You're doing the right thing, remember that." She dropped her cigarette on the concrete and stepped on it. She walked back into the hospital.

Hopper went back to Will's room after another cigarette. He just stood by the door, not even paying attention to what was happening. Visiting hours were almost over. Down the hall, he saw a group of people come from down the hallway lead by the woman who borrowed his lighter. He left the room and towards the vending machine to listen in on what they were saying as they went back towards 012's room.

"I'm going to get a snack," he said, already hurrying out the door.

He fished for spare change in his wallet, fumbling to put it into the machine. He stared directly in front of him as he overheard their conversation from down the hall.

"-it already set up by the time we transport it back to the lab," the woman said. "We want this to go as smoothly and efficiently as possible now that Dr. Brenner's gone."

"Eleven hundred hours is when they sign over custody of 012," another voice said. "So it'll all be over before noon, ma'am. Everything will be set up and ready for neutralizing the asset."

"We've already started the shredding then, right?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am. The team back at the lab said it'll be finished before the morning."

"Great," she said. "Then by noon, we'll be rid of all evidence of 012's existence." She sighed loudly and said, "If that monster had just killed it in the first place, this would have been much less of a headache for all of us."

Hopper's breath stopped in an instant. He froze at the vending

machine, not even realizing that his snack had dropped down.

They were going to kill her. They were going to erase any trace of her existence. She was nothing more than a lamb to the slaughter. All he could think about was her innocent green eyes looking at him as he walked out of the room, pleading for help.

He had to do something. He had to help her.

He walked back inside and gave his snack to Johnathan. He put on a face like nothing was wrong. When visiting hours were up, he walked them both to their car and sat in his truck for a minute until they had driven off.

His mind was racing with thoughts and doubts and anxieties of his totally unformed plan of how to get this girl out of the hospital unnoticed. Once inside, he told the lady at the desk that he had forgotten his hat inside Will's room and with a scolding look, she reluctantly let him through. He went up the stairs to Will's floor and waited just outside the door, waiting to hear if anyone was coming. He didn't hear anything.

He halfway sprinted down the empty halls and stopped once he got to the corridor where 012 was. He looked down briefly and saw a guard sitting in a chair outside her room. With a deep breath, he walked down the hall as casually as possible.

"Sir, visiting hours are over," said the guard, seeing him down the hall.

"Yeah, I know," Hopper said, smiling. "I just forgot my hat."

"Happens to the best of us," said the guard jokingly. "Just be quick about it, ok?"

He stopped in front of the door and said, "The thing is, it's in that room. I left it on the table by accident."

"I can't let you go in there, sir," the guard said, returning to his normal, professional aura. "Off-limits."

"Ok, that's fine," he said, backing away. He stopped briefly and

looked back at the guard. "Could you get it for me then? It's just on the table. My wife always gets mad at me when I lose it. Don't want the missus having another reason to be angry. I'm already late for dinner." He forced a laugh.

The guard chuckled and said, "I know how it is, man. On the table you said?"

"Yeah," Hopper replied. "Thanks, I really appreciate it."

The guard stood up and turned around to open the door.

Hopper immediately pulled out his gun and smashed it onto the guard's head, knocking him to the floor. His heart was racing. He opened the door and looked at the girl within. It looked like she had just woken up at the sudden commotion outside. Hopper gestured for her to come with him. She looked at him with confused eyes and stayed still.

He saw the chalkboard on the table beside her and quickly scribbled, *Come with me. I'll get you out. Hurry!*

She nodded at him with a huge smile on her face. He erased it as quickly as possible and then turned to the girl. They began pulling all the tubes and everything that kept her attached to the hospital bed. Hopper grabbed her hand and poked his head out of the door, seeing if anyone was coming. 012 made a small noise when she saw the unconscious guard at her feet, but Hopper pulled her away quickly and they began hurriedly walking towards the stairway. They paused briefly at the bottom of the stairs.

It was in this stairway that he had once broken down sobbing at the loss of his daughter. And now, he was saving a little girl from certain death. Strange, how life works. Hopper's mind was racing with the question of how on earth he was going to sneak this girl out to realize this. They both crouched down at the bottom of the stairs and he began trying to pantomime what he wanted her to do.

He pointed to 012 and then laid out a flat hand while his other formed a person with his pointer and middle fingers. He put the person onto his flat hand and bent the person down.

"You; crouch," he mouthed to her.

While in the crouched position, he began walking his fingers along his hand, then he traced a rectangle shape in the air.

"Go to the door," he mouthed.

He was about to start the next part of his directions, but she was looking quite confused at this point. Suddenly he remembered the paper in his pocket and began scribbling instructions to the girl.

Crouch down and head for the door. Wait for me behind the tree on your left. Stay low. Stay hidden.

Once she had read it, she nodded in understanding.

Hopper walked out the door, immediately going to the desk to distract the nurse on duty with an excuse as to why he didn't have his hat. 012 had crouched low to the ground and was running towards the door with her head down, out of sight to the desk.

"I got all the way up there and realized I left my hat in the back of my car," he said, leaning his elbow on the reception desk.

"Ok, well, have a good night, Chief," she said, laughing at his mistake.

"Will do, Delores!" he said, walking out the door. He didn't see 012 so he figured she had gotten out fine.

It was dark outside by this point. The street lamps were the only things lighting the mostly empty parking lot. Immediately, Hopper headed for his left where he found 012 hiding behind the tree. He took off his jacket and put it over her shoulder in an attempt to disguise the hospital gown she attired. He led her hurriedly over to his truck. After he had helped her up into the back seat, he buckled her seat belt and got in the driver's seat. He raced off into the night, still amazed at how he managed to pull it off without a hitch.

He knew he couldn't go back to his house. They were bound to look for her there. His mind raced with possibilities.

Maybe Joyce would house her until he figured out something more

permanent? No, the fewer people that knew of her whereabouts the better. It was a bit of a drive, but he knew he had his grandfather's hunting cabin in the woods. They would never look there. Barely anyone knew it existed.

He made a rather dangerous U-Turn which jostled 012 quite a bit in the back and headed off to the cabin in the night air.

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